

## Daily Devotional, July 7, 2021 An Outcast, Recast in God's Image

***“When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.” Luke 19:5-6 (NIV)***

We know only some sparse about Zacchaeus before his first encounter with Jesus. He know that he was a wealthy Jewish man who lived in the town of Jericho, and that his occupation was that of a tax collector. When he makes his lone appearance in Luke's gospel, he is doing all that he can to catch a glimpse of Jesus as he travels through Jericho. Zacchaeus has a hard time seeing Jesus because, as this passage says, "...he was short." So in order to see Jesus better, he climbs up a tree, a sycamore fig tree to be more precise.

Tax collectors were despised by the Jewish people. There were two major reasons for this. First, no one likes to give their hard-earned money away. Tax collectors collect that hard-earned money on behalf of the government and that does not make them many friendships. Secondly, tax collectors during the time of Jesus represented Rome. They were a reminder of foreign occupation. In the gospels, they are often given the title "sinners." They were considered outcasts who turned on their own country in service to Rome, while making a profit off the people within their own community.

One could speculate that Zacchaeus did not simply climb that tree because he was short, he may have climbed that tree because he was not welcome to stand among his people. His occupation and his actions harmed the people of Jericho. When Jesus called him down from that tree, it was not just to go to Zacchaeus' house, it was also meant to give him a new start on his life. What Zacchaeus needed was for someone to offer grace and extend mercy to him. That is exactly what Jesus did. He approached this outcast tax collector and welcomed him back. Into the family. Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:9-10)

It truly is difficult to imagine what the day-to-day life of Zacchaeus was like. It was normal for him to be an outcast, to be shunned by his own community. When Jesus arrived, he offered a chance at reconciliation. Through this encounter, Zacchaeus was reconnected. Like Zacchaeus, we find new life when we encounter Jesus. When we experience the moments of our lives where we are shunned because of who we are or because of our actions, Jesus speaks mercy and grace and offers us salvation, a new normal to red efine our lives. May we ever be so grateful.

***Prayer: Holy Lord, I pray today to be reconciled to you. Although I may stray from your direction, I am confident that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: The old has gone, the new has come. I pray to live in Christ, to let go of my worldly desires and instead follow where Jesus leads. May I be made new in Christ, to be reconciled to you, Trusting in your forgiveness and your care, Amen.***